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# Ehrhart polynomials of polytopes and orthogonal polynomial systems

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## Abstract

In this draft, for the study of the zeros of the Ehrhart polynomials of reflexive polytopes, we consider a relation between the Ehrhart polynomials of reflexive polytopes and orthogonal polynomial systems.

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Ehrhart polynomials of integral convex polytopes

Let  $\mathcal{P} \subset \mathbb{R}^N$  be an integral convex polytope, which is a convex polytope all of whose vertices have integer coordinates, of dimension  $n$ . Given a positive integer  $x \in \mathbb{Z}_{>0}$ , we write

$$i(\mathcal{P}, x) = |x\mathcal{P} \cap \mathbb{Z}^N|,$$

where  $x\mathcal{P} = \{x\alpha : \alpha \in \mathcal{P}\}$  and  $|\cdot|$  denotes the cardinality. The studies on  $i(\mathcal{P}, x)$  originated in the work of Ehrhart ([9]), who proved that the enumerative function  $i(\mathcal{P}, x)$  can be described as a polynomial in  $x$  of degree  $n$  whose constant term is 1. We call the polynomial  $i(\mathcal{P}, x)$  the *Ehrhart polynomial* of  $\mathcal{P}$ . We refer the reader to [5, Chapter 3] or [12, Part II] for the introduction to the theory of Ehrhart polynomials.

We also define the integers  $\delta_0, \delta_1, \dots$  by the following formula

$$\sum_{x=0}^{\infty} i(\mathcal{P}, x)t^x = \frac{\sum_{i=0}^{\infty} \delta_i t^i}{(1-t)^{n+1}}.$$

Since  $i(\mathcal{P}, x)$  is a polynomial in  $x$  of degree  $n$ , we know that  $\delta_i = 0$  for every  $i > n$  (consult, e.g., [18, Corollary 4.3.1]). The integer sequence  $\delta(\mathcal{P}) = (\delta_0, \delta_1, \dots, \delta_n)$  is

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called the  $\delta$ -vector (alternately,  $h^*$ -vector or Ehrhart  $h$ -vector) of  $\mathcal{P}$ . The following properties on  $\delta$ -vectors are well known:

- One has  $\delta_0 = 1$ ,  $\delta_1 = |\mathcal{P} \cap \mathbb{Z}^N| - (n + 1)$ .
- One has  $\delta_n = |(\mathcal{P} \setminus \partial\mathcal{P}) \cap \mathbb{Z}^N|$ . Hence, we also have  $\delta_1 \geq \delta_n$ .
- Each  $\delta_i$  is nonnegative ([17]).
- The leading coefficient of  $i(\mathcal{P}, x)$ , which equals  $\sum_{i=0}^n \delta_i/n!$ , coincides with the volume of  $\mathcal{P}$  ([18, Corollary 3.20]).
- The Ehrhart polynomial can be described like

$$i(\mathcal{P}, x) = \sum_{k=0}^n \delta_k \binom{x + n - k}{n}.$$

## 1.2 Reflexive polytopes

For an integral convex polytope  $\mathcal{P} \subset \mathbb{R}^n$  of dimension  $n$ , we say that  $\mathcal{P}$  is a *reflexive polytope* if  $\mathcal{P}$  contains the origin of  $\mathbb{R}^n$  as the unique interior integer point and the dual polytope  $\mathcal{P}^\vee$  of  $\mathcal{P}$  is also integral, where  $\mathcal{P}^\vee = \{x \in \mathbb{R}^n : \langle x, y \rangle \leq 1 \text{ for all } y \in \mathcal{P}\}$  and  $\langle \cdot, \cdot \rangle$  denotes the usual inner product of  $\mathbb{R}^n$ .

Recently, the zeros of the Ehrhart polynomials of integral convex polytopes have been studied by many researchers ([4, 6, 7, 10, 11, 14, 15]). Especially, the distribution of the real parts of the zeros is of particular interest. In [4, Conjecture 1.4], it was conjectured that all the zeros  $\alpha$  of the Ehrhart polynomial of an integral convex polytope of dimension  $n$  satisfy  $-n \leq \Re(\alpha) \leq n - 1$ , where  $\Re(\alpha)$  stands for the real part of  $\alpha$ . However, this conjecture has been disproved by [11] and [15].

On the other hand, for a reflexive polytope  $\mathcal{P}$  of dimension  $n$ , its Ehrhart polynomial has an extremal property. More precisely, the following functional equation holds:

$$i(\mathcal{P}, x) = (-1)^n i(\mathcal{P}, -x - 1).$$

This says that all the zeros of the Ehrhart polynomials of reflexive polytopes are distributed symmetrically in the complex plane with respect to the vertical line  $\Re(z) = -1/2$ . Note that the line  $\Re(z) = -1/2$  is the bisector of the vertical strip  $-n \leq \Re(z) \leq n - 1$ . Hence the problem of which reflexive polytope whose Ehrhart polynomial has the property

all the zeros of the Ehrhart polynomial have the same real part  $-1/2 \dots\dots\dots (\#)$

arises naturally and looks fascinating. This is solved by [6, Proposition 1.9] in the case of  $n \leq 4$ . In order to try this problem for the general case, we employ the idea of orthogonal polynomials.

### 1.3 Orthogonal polynomial and its zeros

We refer the reader to [8] for the introduction to orthogonal polynomial systems. Let  $\{f_n(x)\}_{n=0}^{\infty}$  be an orthogonal polynomial system with respect to a positive-definite moment functional. (In the rest of this draft, we often write “a (positive-definite) OPS” instead of an orthogonal polynomial system with respect to a (positive-definite) moment functional.) We say that a polynomial is a (positive-definite) orthogonal polynomial if it is one polynomial of some (positive-definite) OPS. On the zeros of an orthogonal polynomial, the following is a well-known fact:

**Theorem 1** (cf. [8, Theorem 5.2]) *The zeros of  $f_n(x)$  are all real and simple.*

On the other hand, for the Ehrhart polynomial  $i(\mathcal{P}, x)$  of some reflexive polytope  $\mathcal{P}$  of dimension  $n$ , let  $f_n(x) = i(\mathcal{P}, \sqrt{-1}x - 1/2)$ . If we know that  $f_n(x)$  is a positive-definite OPS, then all the zeros of  $f_n(x)$  are real numbers by Theorem 1. It then follows from  $f_n(x) = i(\mathcal{P}, \sqrt{-1}x - 1/2)$  that  $\mathcal{P}$  has the property (#), that is, all the zeros of  $i(\mathcal{P}, x)$  have the same real part  $-1/2$ .

Such a consideration would naturally lead the author into the temptation to study the following problem:

**Problem 2** *Find or characterize reflexive polytopes  $\mathcal{P}$  whose Ehrhart polynomial  $i(\mathcal{P}, x)$  satisfies that  $i(\mathcal{P}, \sqrt{-1}x - 1/2)$  is a positive-definite orthogonal polynomial.*

A challenge to this problem is significant towards a complete characterization of reflexive polytopes which have the property (#).

### 1.4 Organization

A brief organization of this draft is as follows. In Section 2, we discuss a relation between the Ehrhart polynomials of reflexive polytopes and OPS. Especially, we consider a certain three-terms recurrence formula for the Ehrhart polynomials of reflexive polytopes (Proposition 4). In Section 3, we find four examples of reflexive polytopes each of whose Ehrhart polynomials  $i(\mathcal{P}, x)$  satisfies that  $i(\mathcal{P}, \sqrt{-1}x - 1/2)$  is a positive-definite orthogonal polynomial (Examples 5, 6, 7 and 8). Finally, in Section 4, as one small partial answer for Problem 2, we present Theorem 12.

## 2 Ehrhart polynomials of reflexive polytopes and the three-terms recurrence formula

In this section, we study a relation between the Ehrhart polynomials of reflexive polytopes and OPS.

First, we recall the following proposition, which gives a characterization of reflexive polytopes in terms of Ehrhart polynomials or  $\delta$ -vectors.

**Proposition 3** (cf. [3, 13]) *Let  $\mathcal{P}$  be an integral convex polytope of dimension  $n$ ,  $i(\mathcal{P}, x) = a_n x^n + a_{n-1} x^{n-1} + \dots + 1$  its Ehrhart polynomial and  $\delta(\mathcal{P}) = (\delta_0, \delta_1, \dots, \delta_n)$  its  $\delta$ -vector. Then the following four conditions are equivalent:*

- (a)  $\mathcal{P}$  is unimodularly equivalent to a reflexive polytope;
- (b)  $\delta(\mathcal{P}_n)$  is symmetric, i.e.,  $\delta_j = \delta_{n-j}$  for every  $0 \leq j \leq n$ ;
- (c) the functional equation  $i(\mathcal{P}, x) = (-1)^n i(\mathcal{P}, -x - 1)$  holds;
- (d)  $na_n = 2a_{n-1}$ .

Next, we discuss when a sequence of the Ehrhart polynomials of reflexive polytopes forms an OPS.

**Proposition 4** *Let  $\mathcal{P}_n$ ,  $n \geq 0$ , be reflexive polytopes of dimension  $n$  and let  $f_n(x) = i(\mathcal{P}_n, x)$ . Then the sequence of the Ehrhart polynomials  $\{f_n(x)\}_{n=0}^\infty$  is an OPS if and only if  $\{f_n(x)\}_{n=0}^\infty$  satisfies the three-terms recurrence formula*

$$f_n(x) = M_n(2x + 1)f_{n-1}(x) + (1 - M_n)f_{n-2}(x) \text{ for } n \geq 2, \quad (1)$$

where each  $M_n$  is a positive rational number. Moreover, let  $g_n(x) = f_n(\sqrt{-1}x - 1/2)/k_n$ , where  $k_n$  is the leading coefficient of the polynomial  $f_n(\sqrt{-1}x - 1/2)$ . Then  $\{g_n(x)\}_{n=0}^\infty$  is a positive-definite OPS if and only if  $\{g_n(x)\}_{n=0}^\infty$  satisfies the three-terms recurrence formula

$$g_n(x) = xg_{n-1}(x) - N_ng_{n-2}(x) \text{ for } n \geq 2,$$

where each  $N_n$  is a rational number with  $N_n > 0$  for  $n \geq 2$ .

A sketch of proof is as follows. In general, by [8, Theorem 4.1] together with [8, Theorem 4.4], a sequence  $\{h_n(x)\}_{n=0}^\infty$  of the polynomials  $h_n(x)$  of degree  $n$  is OPS if and only if this satisfies a certain three-terms recurrence formula, which is of the form

$$h_n(x) = (A_n x + B_n)h_{n-1}(x) + C_n h_{n-2}(x).$$

Thanks to Proposition 3, we obtain that  $A_n = 2B_n$  in the case of the Ehrhart polynomials of reflexive polytopes. Moreover, since the constant of the Ehrhart polynomial is always 1, we also obtain  $B_n + C_n = 1$ . In addition, it is also known that  $\{h_n(x)\}_{n=0}^\infty$  is a positive-definite OPS if and only if  $C_n$  is always negative for each  $n \geq 2$ .

### 3 Examples of reflexive polytopes whose Ehrhart polynomials satisfy (1)

In this section, we present some examples of reflexive polytopes. The Ehrhart polynomials of such examples satisfy the recurrence (1).

Let  $\mathbf{e}_1, \dots, \mathbf{e}_n \in \mathbb{R}^n$  be the unit vectors of  $\mathbb{R}^n$ .

**Example 5 (cross polytope)** Let  $\mathcal{P}_n = \text{conv}(\{\pm \mathbf{e}_1, \dots, \pm \mathbf{e}_n\})$ . Then this is called a *cross polytope* of dimension  $n$ . Let  $f_n(x) = i(\mathcal{P}_n, x)$  be its Ehrhart polynomial and  $\delta(\mathcal{P}_n)$  its  $\delta$ -vector. Then it is well known that  $\delta(\mathcal{P}_n) = \left(\binom{n}{0}, \binom{n}{1}, \dots, \binom{n}{n}\right)$ , i.e.,

$$f_n(x) = \sum_{k=0}^n \binom{n}{k} \binom{x+n-k}{n}.$$

Note that the leading coefficient of  $f_n(x)$  is equal to  $\sum_{k=0}^n \binom{n}{k} / n! = 2^n / n!$ .

Now one can check by a direct computation that  $f_n(x)$  satisfies (1) with  $M_n = 1/n$ , that is,

$$f_n(x) = \frac{1}{n}(2x+1)f_{n-1}(x) + \frac{n-1}{n}f_{n-2}(x) \quad \text{for } n \geq 2. \quad (2)$$

Let

$$\tilde{f}_n(x) = \frac{n! \cdot f_n(\sqrt{-1}x - \frac{1}{2})}{\sqrt{-1}^n 2^n}.$$

Then  $\tilde{f}_n(x)$  is a monic polynomial in  $x$ . From (2), one sees that  $\tilde{f}_n(x)$  satisfies the recurrence

$$\tilde{f}_n(x) = x \widetilde{f_{n-1}}(x) - \frac{(n-1)^2}{4} \widetilde{f_{n-2}}(x) \quad \text{for } n \geq 2.$$

Since  $(n-1)^2/4 > 0$  for  $n \geq 2$ , this says that  $\{\tilde{f}_n(x)\}_{n=0}^\infty$  is a positive-definite OPS by Proposition 4. Hence  $\tilde{f}_n(x)$  has the zeros which are all real and simple.

Therefore, we conclude that each cross polytope has the property (#).

**Example 6 (dual of Stasheff polytope)** Let  $\mathcal{P}_n = \text{conv}(\{\pm \mathbf{e}_1, \dots, \pm \mathbf{e}_n\} \cup \{\mathbf{e}_i + \dots + \mathbf{e}_j : 1 \leq i < j \leq n\})$ . Note that this is a convex hull of the *almost positive roots* of type A Weyl group and this is a dual polytope of so-called the *Stasheff polytope* of dimension  $n$ . Then it is known by Athanasiadis [2] that  $\delta(\mathcal{P}_n) = \left(\frac{1}{n+1} \binom{n+1}{0} \binom{n+1}{1}, \frac{1}{n+1} \binom{n+1}{1} \binom{n+1}{2}, \dots, \frac{1}{n+1} \binom{n+1}{n} \binom{n+1}{n+1}\right)$ , i.e.,

$$f_n(x) = \sum_{k=0}^n \frac{1}{n+1} \binom{n+1}{k} \binom{n+1}{k+1} \binom{x+n-k}{n}.$$

Here we note that each  $\frac{1}{n+1} \binom{n+1}{k} \binom{n+1}{k+1}$  is known as the *Narayana number*. We notice that the leading coefficient of  $f_n(x)$  is equal to  $\sum_{k=0}^n \frac{1}{n+1} \binom{n+1}{k} \binom{n+1}{k+1} / n! = C_{n+1} / n!$ , where  $C_n$  is the *Catalan number*.

Now one can check that  $f_n(x)$  satisfies (1) with  $M_n = (2n+1)/n(n+2)$ , that is,

$$f_n(x) = \frac{2n+1}{n(n+2)}(2x+1)f_{n-1}(x) + \frac{(n+1)(n-1)}{n(n+2)}f_{n-2}(x) \text{ for } n \geq 2.$$

Let

$$\tilde{f}_n(x) = \frac{n! \cdot f_n(\sqrt{-1}x - \frac{1}{2})}{\sqrt{-1}^n C_{n+1}}.$$

Then  $\tilde{f}_n(x)$  is a monic polynomial in  $x$  and one sees that  $\tilde{f}_n(x)$  satisfies the recurrence

$$\tilde{f}_n(x) = x\widetilde{f_{n-1}}(x) - \frac{(n^2-1)^2}{4(4n^2-1)}\widetilde{f_{n-2}}(x) \text{ for } n \geq 2.$$

Since  $(n^2-1)^2/4(4n^2-1) > 0$  for  $n \geq 2$ , this says that  $\{\tilde{f}_n(x)\}_{n=0}^\infty$  is a positive-definite OPS. Hence  $\tilde{f}_n(x)$  has the zeros which are all real and simple.

Therefore, we conclude that each dual polytope of the Stasheff polytope has the property (#).

**Example 7 (root polytope of type A)** Let  $\mathcal{P}_n = \text{conv}(\{\pm \mathbf{e}_1, \dots, \pm \mathbf{e}_n\} \cup \{\pm(\mathbf{e}_i + \dots + \mathbf{e}_j) : 1 \leq i < j \leq n\})$ . Note that this is a convex hull of the positive roots of type A Weyl group and this is the *root polytope of type A* of dimension  $n$ . Then it is known by [1] that  $\delta(\mathcal{P}_n) = \left(\binom{n}{0}^2, \binom{n}{1}^2, \dots, \binom{n}{n}^2\right)$ , i.e.,

$$f_n(x) = \sum_{k=0}^n \binom{n}{k}^2 \binom{x+n-k}{n}.$$

Note that the leading coefficient of  $f_n(x)$  is equal to  $\sum_{k=0}^n \binom{n}{k}^2 / n! = \binom{2n}{n} / n!$ .

Now one can check that  $f_n(x)$  satisfies (1) with  $M_n = (2n-1)/n^2$ , that is,

$$f_n(x) = \frac{2n-1}{n^2}(2x+1)f_{n-1}(x) + \frac{(n-1)^2}{n^2}f_{n-2}(x) \text{ for } n \geq 2.$$

Let

$$\tilde{f}_n(x) = \frac{n! \cdot f_n(\sqrt{-1}x - \frac{1}{2})}{\sqrt{-1}^n \binom{2n}{n}}.$$

Then  $\tilde{f}_n(x)$  is a monic polynomial in  $x$  and one sees that  $\tilde{f}_n(x)$  satisfies the recurrence

$$\tilde{f}_n(x) = x\widetilde{f_{n-1}}(x) - \frac{(n-1)^4}{4(2n-1)(2n-3)}\widetilde{f_{n-2}}(x) \text{ for } n \geq 2.$$

Since  $(n-1)^4/4(2n-1)(2n-3) > 0$  for  $n \geq 2$ , this says that  $\{\tilde{f}_n(x)\}_{n=0}^\infty$  is a positive-definite OPS. Hence  $\tilde{f}_n(x)$  has the zeros which are all real and simple.

Therefore, we conclude that each root polytope of type A has the property (#).

**Example 8 (root polytope of type C)** Let  $\mathcal{P}_n = \text{conv}(\{\pm(\mathbf{e}_i + \cdots + \mathbf{e}_{j-1}) : 1 \leq i < j \leq n\} \cup \{\pm(2(\mathbf{e}_i + \cdots + \mathbf{e}_{n-1}) + \mathbf{e}_n) : 1 \leq i \leq n-1\})$ . Note that this is a convex hull of the positive roots of type C Weyl group and this is the *root polytope of type C* of dimension  $n$ . Then it is also known by [1] that  $\delta(\mathcal{P}_n) = \left(\binom{2n}{0}, \binom{2n}{2}, \dots, \binom{2n}{2n}\right)$ , i.e.,

$$f_n(x) = \sum_{k=0}^n \binom{2n}{2k} \binom{x+n-k}{n}.$$

Note that the leading coefficient of  $f_n(x)$  is equal to  $\sum_{k=0}^n \binom{2n}{2k} / n! = 2^{2n-1} / n!$ .

Now one can check that  $f_n(x)$  satisfies (1) with  $M_n = 2/n$ , that is,

$$f_n(x) = \frac{2}{n}(2x+1)f_{n-1}(x) + \frac{n-2}{n}f_{n-2}(x) \text{ for } n \geq 2.$$

Let

$$\tilde{f}_n(x) = \frac{n! \cdot f_n(\sqrt{-1}x - \frac{1}{2})}{\sqrt{-1}^n 2^{2n-1}}.$$

Then  $\tilde{f}_n(x)$  is a monic polynomial in  $x$  and one sees that  $\tilde{f}_n(x)$  satisfies the recurrence

$$\tilde{f}_n(x) = x\tilde{f}_{n-1}(x) - \frac{(n-1)(n-2)}{16}\tilde{f}_{n-2}(x) \text{ for } n \geq 2.$$

Since  $(n-1)(n-2)/16$  is 0 if  $n = 2$ , this is not an OPS.

We notice that since  $f_2(x) = (2x+1)^2$ ,  $f_n(x)$  is divisible by  $(2x+1)$  for  $n \geq 1$  by the above recurrence. Thus, when we let  $g_n(x) = f_{n+1}(x)/(2x+1)$  for  $n \geq 1$  and  $g_0(x) = 1$ , it is easy to see that

$$g_n(x) = \frac{1}{n}(2x+1)g_{n-1}(x) + \frac{n-1}{n}g_{n-2}(x) \text{ for } n \geq 2.$$

This is nothing but the recurrence in Example 5. Therefore, we conclude that each root polytope of type C has the property (#).

**Remark 9** In the above four examples, each of the Ehrhart polynomials satisfies the recurrence (1) with some certain  $M_n$ . Then each  $M_n$  is actually a nonincreasing rational function on  $n$  with  $0 < M_n \leq 1$  for  $n \geq 2$ . We also notice that the above  $M_n$ 's take four distinct values  $1/2, 5/8, 3/4$  and  $1$  when  $n = 2$ .

**Remark 10** Some of the above examples can be written as a hypergeometric function. For example,

$$\begin{aligned} \sum_{k=0}^n \binom{n}{k} \binom{x+n-k}{n} &= {}_2F_1(-n, -x; 1; 2), \\ \sum_{k=0}^n \binom{n}{k}^2 \binom{x+n-k}{n} &= {}_3F_2(-n, n+1, -x; 1, 1; 1). \end{aligned}$$



These are related to the *Hahn polynomial*, which is a hypergeometric orthogonal polynomial. Consult, e.g., [8, Chapter V-3].

## 4 Result

Finally, we discuss the existence of the other examples except for the four examples appearing in the previous section.

We consider  $M_n$  appearing in the recurrence (1). In particular, we notice the case of  $n = 2$ , i.e.,  $M_2$ .

Here we recall the following well-known result.

**Proposition 11** (cf. [16, Section 5]) *There are 16 reflexive polytopes of dimension 2 up to unimodular equivalence. In particular, there are 7 Ehrhart polynomials of reflexive polytopes of dimension 2, which are*

$$ax^2 + ax + 1, \quad a = \frac{3}{2}, 2, \frac{5}{2}, 3, \frac{7}{2}, 4, \frac{9}{2}.$$

From this proposition,  $M_n$  appearing in (1) must be equal to one of

$$\frac{3}{8}, \frac{4}{8}, \frac{5}{8}, \frac{6}{8}, \frac{7}{8}, \frac{8}{8}, \frac{9}{8}$$

when  $n = 2$ .

On the one hand, as mentioned in Remark 9, we know the examples of reflexive polytopes in the case where  $M_2$  is equal to  $4/8, 5/8, 6/8$  or  $8/8$ .

On the other hand, when  $M_2 = 9/8$ , the corresponding Ehrhart polynomial of reflexive polytope of dimension 2 is  $9/2x^2 + 9/2x + 1 = (3x+1)(3x+2)/2$ . Obviously, the zeros of this polynomial do not have the same real part  $-1/2$ .

Hence it is natural to think of the case where  $M_2$  is equal to  $3/8$  or  $7/8$ . The following is the main theorem of this draft, which gives one small partial answer for Problem 2.

**Theorem 12** (a) *There exists a sequence of the Ehrhart polynomials of reflexive polytopes  $\{i(\mathcal{P}_n, x)\}_{n=0}^{\infty}$  satisfying the three-terms recurrence (1) with certain  $\{M_n\}_{n=2}^{\infty}$ , where  $M_2$  is one of  $\{4/8, 5/8, 6/8, 8/8\}$ .*

(b) *On the contrary, there exists no sequence of the Ehrhart polynomials of reflexive polytopes  $\{i(\mathcal{P}_n, x)\}_{n=0}^{\infty}$  satisfying the three-terms recurrence (1) if we assume that  $M_n$  is a monotone decreasing rational function on  $n$  and  $M_2$  is one of  $\{3/8, 7/8\}$ .*

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